DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 281 808 SO 018 130

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TITLE Assessing the Psychological Impact of Sociocultural Change: A Life-History Methodology.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Psychological Association (32nd, Fort Worth, TX, April 17-19, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Biographies; Change; Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Context; Cultural Influences; Developing Nations; *Ethnology; *Needs; Non Western Civilization; Psychological Studies; *Research Methodology; *Social Change; *Sociocultural Patterns; *Sociology; Values
IDENTIFIERS *Life History Method

ABSTRACT

The twentieth century has been an era of rapid, world-wide industrialization. Very little is known about the psychological impact of this process, and traditional assessment methods which universalize Western values are largely inappropriate. A prime example of universalizing Western characteristics is Inkeles' and Smith's popular Modernity Scales (1974, 1983), which are designed on the premise that modernity corresponds to good psychological health. This led to choosing inappropriate indicators of what modernity is in developing countries. The Modernity Scales exemplify many of the fundamental weaknesses of objectivistic assessment strategies in intercultural research. Perhaps a qualitatively-rooted life-history model which would entail multiple life-history interviews is in order. An illustration of this life-history method was published by Bustamente in 1983. It told of a 20-year-old woman who migrated to Tijuana at age 17 to work in a maquiladora factory. The major conflicting discourses or roles in this woman's life were discussed on the assumption that these contradictions are the expressions of conflicting social pressures in her life. As a guide to this analysis, one can assess the fulfillment of basic human needs or powers. Six needs or powers are described by Bulhan in his "Critical Psychology of Liberation" (1985): biological needs; rootedness; integrity, and self-clarity; symbolic immortality; self-reproduction through praxis; and maximum self-determination. The point of this method is not to concentrate solely on an individual account but to collect a number of such accounts, and to analyse them as though they were a set of Thematic Apperception Test responses. (BZ)

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ASSESSING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGE: A LIFE-HISTORY METHODOLOGY

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Running head: ASSESSING SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGE

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Abstract

Much of the globe is currently in the process of rapid industrialization. Very little is known about the psychological impact of this process. Since traditional assessment methods are largely inappropriate, a multifaceted life history approach is proposed. Advantages and problems in this method are illustrated in a brief discussion of a marginal social group (women) in a third-world country, through the case of one maquiladora worker. Initial results of this study indicate that a synthesis of social, cognitive, and psychoanalytic models clarifies the raw data collected by previous sociological and anthropological research. The relevance of this work to intercultural studies in general is briefly discussed.

Assessing the psychological impact of sociocultural change: a life-history methodology.

The twentieth century has been an era of rapid, world-wide industrialization. "Third world" countries have sought to attain more than a century of industrial evolution in the period of a few short decades. The psychological impact of this rapid modernization has yet to be adequately assessed. Accurate assessment of the situation is necessary in order to diagnose and prevent potentially problematic consequences of the sort experienced in the material realm in the Ethiopian famine, in shanty towns, and in other places where rapid industrialization has resulted in emotional, economic, and social chaos.

A few assessment attempts have been made in this area, but all of these have used objectivistic methodology largely inappropriate to sociocultural study. Techniques used in intercultural study share a number of general misconceptions and implicit flaws. In a nutshell, they universalize Western values, and they "force" the definition of independent and dependent variables in uncontrolled settings where such variables are artificial. Inkeles' and Smith's popular Modernity scales (1974, 1983) will be used to exemplify many of the fundamental weaknesses of objectivistic assessment strategies in intercultural research. In the second part of this paper, a methodological assessment alternative will be discussed. The Modernity scales were designed from a mock-longitudinal study (i.e. the initial subjects were matched across numerous demographic variables), and then applied to six developing countries. The resulting overall modernity

index (OM) is based on individuals' answers to four categories of questions: attitude, value, information, and behavior.

In a prime example of universalizing Western characteristics, Inkeles and Smith designed their questionnaire on the premise that modernity corresponds to good psychological health. This led them to choose inappropriate indicators of what modernity is. They proceeded on the assumption that "healthy" personal characteristics such as openmindedness, trust, and dispositionalism (i.e. the belief that responsibility is personal) indicate a modern frame of mind. The reader's consideration of these characteristics should raise a question about their uniqueness to modern individuals, and therefore their value as indicators of modernity. Furthermore, the authors defined modern environments as being characterized by strong nuclear families and a lack of social stratification. These statements are logically revealed as misconceptions when one considers political theorists' arguments that the apparent "closeness" of the modern family may be due to general alienation from others in the community; and that it is class consciousness, not social stratification, which is missing in modern settings.

The authors stretch their misconceptions even further by introducing the modern factory as the primary school of modernization and therefore as a promoter of psychological health. They argue that the modern factory presents a positive model of openness to change, because management is continually improving its technology; and a model of respect for subordinates, because management treats subordinates better than traditional workplaces do. The possibility of the factory as a negative model of change was ruled out as insignificant by the authors; while the

validity of their claim that industry's treatment of workers is more humane than what is received in traditional workplaces was never questioned, despite the contradiction of this claim to modern sociological research in Third World societies (Mitter,1984 and Nash and Fernandez-Kelly,1983), and philosophical critiques by Marx, Lukacs, and others.

Inkeles and Smith also believe that independence and self-worth are promoted through the factory system of reward and punishment. Again, their assumption disagrees with anthropological and sociological evidence which suggests that modern factories are actually destructive to workers' self-image and feelings of efficacy (Nash and Fernandez-Kelly, 1983).

Overall, Inkeles' conceptualization of modern man is what one might expect from a pair of ivory-tower intellectuals: a suspiciously well-adjusted intellectual. This modern man's primary characteristics consist of openness to new experiences, intellectual self-sufficiency, the utmost faith in science, educational ambition, a high degree of time-structuredness, and political involvement (1984, p.101).

The bias in their definition of modernity has warped the entire project. Testifying to the irrelevance of the Modernity scales is its pool of items. One attitudinal question asks the individual if s/he would be able to understand the thinking of someone from a far away country, scoring "yes" as the modern answer. This is a ludicrously idealistic item as very few Americans, surely a "modern" people, could claim to understand the thinking of a Russian. Another item of this type asked if an unmarried eighteen year old girl should be allowed to work outside of her hometown, scoring "under most circumstances" as the most modern response. Interestingly, the most traditional of Third World families send their daughters to distant factories

to help support the family (Mitter, 1984). In industrializing America it was also a common practice to send children of both sexes and all ages to work for the family; a principle coined "child labor" which is not now considered modern or virtuous.

One value item set up a hypothetical question where a young man is choosing a wife and the respondant offers advice on which characteristic, beauty or housemanaging ability, to weigh most strongly in prospective brides. Is there a modern response to this question? Or are both characteristics inappropriate criteria for choosing a bride? On the one hand, a modern perspective would insist that choosing a spouse should be based on more practical considerations than beauty. On the other hand, this same perspective would find offense in choosing a wife for her housemanaging ability: Such a criterion is much more appropriate in choosing a slave or a maid. The respondant is not allowed the opportunity to advise compatibility or fondness, which is rather an ironic oversight in a study purporting that interpersonal adequacy is a modern characteristic.

In the information category, an individual may be asked to list the biggest problems s/he sees facing her/his country. This item is scored positively for the number of problems or words in the answer. This action is questionable on two counts. First, is the item a measure of modernity, or a measure of loquaciousness (a trait not limited to a modern frame of mind)? Secondly, it again raises the question of the adjustment-assessing value of this scale: would not an "hysterical" or "paranoid" individual answer this item at greater length than a "healthy" subject?

The last category tapped, behavior, inquires in one question about the organizations the respondant belongs to, scoring for number of

organizations. This item attempts to measure community involvement, but it has a number of shortcomings. For instance, it does not take into consideration the quantity of organizations available to the respondant or the quality of each organizational involvement, e.g. someone who is president of the only group s/he is a member of may be more involved in the community than someone who is peripherally involved in numerous organizations. Neither does it inquire into the voluntary or involuntary nature of the respondant's involvements, nor that person's active or inactive status. In short, this item is a rather poor index of community involvement.

At this point the reader may be wondering how representative the Modernity scale is of the application of traditional assessment techniques to cross-cultural study. Unfortunately, the Modernity scale is very representative of assessment tools in intercultural research, and is also highly referenced and lauded for its standardization of foreign thought into a Western unit which can be easily compared across cultures. Furthermore, this scale has been thoroughly corroborated through the standard means of validation using a nomological network of empirical evidence and even some field interviews. However, as evidenced by all the problems with the Modernity scales, no amount of refinement will make a quantitative measure appropriate for assessing a complex, qualitative phenomenon such as modernity. The reliability of these scales is admirable: They are very good at differentiating in accord with Inkeles' and Smith's definition. It is the construct validity of their project which is most deficient.

This brings up the second issue to be addressed by this paper: If standardized, objectivistic assessment is ineffective in the study of sociocultural change, what method of assessment should replace it?

Perhaps a qualitatively-rooted life-history model might be part of the answer. The life-history model would entail multiple life-history interviews understood in the light of cultural and personality theory. General processes of socialization and decision-making are often revealed in the patterns which recur across specific life-histories. Such a method would focus on the cultural context as it enters the lives of the individuals. It is thereby less apt to impose the cultural values of the researcher upon the investigated culture. In contrast standardized objectivistic assessment inherently project the researcher's cultural bias onto the subjects by analyzing them independently of their cultural context. The life-history model is supported by anthropological suggestions to reshape the investigator's own preunderstandings in the process of research, rather than to analyse a culturally foreign situation through the investigator's native perspective (Langness, 1965).

As an illustration of the life-history method consider the life-history of a twenty-year-old Mexican woman who migrated to Tijuana at age seventeen to work in a maquiladora factory. In her story, published by Bustamente (1983), she told of quickly finding an assembly-line position at a factory where she was grossly underpaid for twelve to thirteen hours a day of a labor-intensive job. She felt:

> "It was a good time for almost all the girls that arrived; if they were just a little smart, they could get a job easily... I had never earned as much as I was making here. I started buying myself new clothes and I learned how to dress well. You know, to 'discover my charms,' like the advertisement says. For the first time in my life I felt like a real woman... I had a hard time at first because I roomed with six other girls in a single room, but later I moved into a better place with two other

> girls. I started saving up money to appease my parents. I had come against their wishes...my father said that Tijuana was like Sodom, a city of sin."

She soon became caught up in credit-buying and all the consumerism associated with her new lifestyle. "Nothing made me happier than to go into a shopping center and start looking at things and buying."

Almost a year later she went home on vacation. "As soon as my father saw me, he accused me of being a prostitute..."--and then

> "my mother ruined everything by reproaching him for not earning as much money as I, even though he is a man. After I had come home, my whole manner of being seemed to him to be a lack of respect on my part."
>
> "When I got back to Tijuana,...they gave me the story that I had signed my resignation with my last pay check...along with everyone else that had gone on vacation at the same time as I."

Each time she found work the same pattern would follow: she would work for a few months and then she and most of the others would be laid off. "I was doing alright until I took on the payments for a color television and started taking English lessons..." This time she refused to fall for the "vacation" line, but

> "they fired me anyway for raising such a stink. They even threatened to blacklist me so I wouldn't be able to work in Tijuana and they accused me of associating with some guys from a union who had the reputation of being Communists."

Later, she got pregnant and had to borrow money to get an abortion. "I wouldn't have been able to do anything with a baby to care for. May God forgive me."

Most of these women can't think of returning to their hometowns. Of the present situation, this subject says, "Things are getting serious here for us. Some of the girls have gotten into prostitution in order to make some

money. But they say that things will get better. . . "

In this brief analysis only the major conflicting discourses or roles apparent in this woman's life will be discussed, working upon the assumption that these contradictions are the expressions of conflicting social pressures in her life. As a guide to this analysis, one can assess the fulfillment of basic human needs or powers. Six needs or powers described by Bulhan in his "critical psychology of liberation" (1985) are (1) biological needs, (2) rootedness, (3) integrity and self-clarity, (4) symbolic immortality, (5) self-reproduction through praxis, and (6) maximum self-determination. Because of the everyday interaction among these needs they often cannot be spelled out. In many cases, social and economic consideration in this woman's life may cause her to meet these needs in contradictory fashion if at all.

One of the most apparent expressions of conflict in this woman's life is illustrated by her move to Tijuana, motivated by a need for financial stability (survival) and self-determination, yet separating her from family, friends,and values, ie. from her very roots. Later, she pours herself into the role of factory worker as she sees it, with all its Western trappings, only to find herself in direct opposition to her father, as he represents her previous life--therefore presenting her with an insoluble conflict to her self-clarity. Even when she realized that factory work offered her little stability and therefore little chance for self-determination, she wasn't presented with a viable alternative and was effectually prevented from returning to her family by the realization that she no longer fit in at home, even though she might not fit in in Tijuana either. She was left with her unstable, mechanical existence, stripped of family, roots and integrity.

The point of this method is not to concentrate solely on an individual account but to collect a number of such accounts and to analyse them as though they were a set of Thematic Apperception Test responses. If other life-histories of migrant workers were collected (see Lewis, 1965 and Fernandez-Kelly, 1983), their similar conflicts could be analyzed, illustrating general trends which depict the psychological significance of socio-cultural change with a depth which could not be achieved through an infinite amount of statistical survey research. This methodology might be equally useful in solving problems in other areas of intercultural study, although it would raise a new set of problems, such as difficulties involving comparative analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, interrater reliability, subjective interpretation leading to bias in the direction of the investigator's hypothesis, and overinterpretation.

Still, there is an urgent need for new assessment techniques which will provide useful answers to how psychologists can help understand development of Third World societies.

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